

**SITUATION REPORT NO. 3**  
**INCIDENT NO. 98-001**  
**DATE: May 12, 1998      TIME: 5:00 p.m.**

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer  
State Capitol  
Bismarck, ND 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Devils Lake Basin flooding. *Special Note: Because most spring flooding activities are concentrated in the Devils Lake Basin and surrounding areas, future information for all flooding (i.e., 1997, 1998 and the Devils Lake Basin) will be reported as Incident 98-001.*
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: No change from previous reports.
3. DAMAGES: Counties in the Devils Lake Basin and surrounding areas have reported substantial infrastructure damages as a result of spring runoff and a rising Devils Lake. They indicate they also have encountered difficulties repairing infrastructure because continuing flooding over the past five years has depleted financial resources. Their damage reports are as follows:

**Benson County**

A Soo Line Railroad freight train derailed on April 30 six miles north of Minnewaukan at the site where Devils Lake flood waters had eroded a rail bed. Four derailed grain cars spilled their contents into Devils Lake. The derailment temporarily blocked traffic on U.S. Highway 281 until responders were able to unhook rail cars. No one was injured in the incident.

Devils Lake flood waters and a high water table continue to claim agricultural land in Benson County. The County Agent reported 32,800 acres of pasture and hayland and 4,200 acres of cropland were lost between 1993 and 1997. During 1995 to 1997, farmers received preventive planting payments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for 138,165 acres that were too wet to cultivate.

Benson County officials have reported additional flood-related problems to include: damages to three bridges along the Mauvais Coulee; and, the inundation and closure of a major arterial, the Woods-Rutten Road. Throughout the county, spring runoff has washed out culverts, has undermined the integrity of roads and has caused deep rutting on extremely soft roadways. Additionally, at least 15 homes along the east side of U.S. Highway 281 are threatened by flood waters, and one home has 10 inches of water in the basement. The Brinsmade Road, and one of its bridges, will also be threatened if the lake rises to 1,445.5 feet.

**Spirit Lake Nation**

There are 45 homes still in the flood plain that need to be moved. Assessment is being done this week by tribal representatives on the road system and any additional damages.

**Nelson County**

Lake Loretta keeps rising, threatening to form one body of water with McHugh's slough and increasing the threat to the city of Michigan. The lake is nearing 1,509.2 feet; the slough is at 1,509.5 feet. Residents in Michigan have reported that the water table is less than three feet deep on the north and west sides of town. At least 40 percent of the homes are operating sump pumps continuously in an effort to keep basements dry. The high water table in the area has caused sewers to backup and cracks on streets that were paved only a few years ago.

The Nelson County Sheriff's Office reports receiving an increasing number of calls from area residents who are frustrated and uncertain about their future in farming given the area's persistent flood-related problems. Deputies and team members from Northeast Human Services recently

responded to a potential suicide threat of a despondent farmer.

One farmstead has become isolated because of inundated lands and roads. Crews are working on building up an alternate road for the family.

Townships have abandoned roads that they cannot afford to fix. The Nelson County Road Superintendent reported 73 soft spots on county roads. While an assessment indicates that most spots are not serious, some spots have water on either side and will remain soft because of the standing water. Two county roads, Nelson County Roads 23 and 4, remain under water.

As indicated in previous reports, sheet water problems have caused a loss of approximately \$20 million in farm-related revenue in the Michigan area of Nelson County, according to the county extension agent. A county-wide review of agricultural losses is underway. Landowners who feel they may be directly affected by increased levels at Stump Lake have reportedly been selling cattle in an attempt to reduce herd sizes. Landowners in that area are concerned about the loss of pasture to flood waters.

The State Water Commission staff estimates that a one-foot overflow of water from Devils Lake would cause a 10-foot rise in Stump Lake. The Nelson County lake covers 7,000 acres in surface area and contains more than 84,000 acre-feet of water. Additional problems resulting from an overflow would include damages to Nelson County roads 15, 23, 23A and 27 and numerous township roads. Dutch Point Road is currently inundated.

### **Pembina County**

Pembina County officials report that problems created in March and April by spring runoff and flooding along the Pembina River have resulted in the closure of the DeFoe Bridge. The bridge, which serves three farm families, was determined unsafe after it sustained substantial flood damage.

Although the river has receded to approximately five feet below its 18-foot flood stage at Neche, water still remains in low-lying areas between Neche and Pembina, where the majority of damages occurred. Pembina River waters inundated four county and township roads in Neche and Pembina Townships. Damage reports from Pembina Township indicate that roads sustained \$12,075 in damages. Two roads are unsafe to travel because wave action has washed away road shoulders. Flood waters washed out another road and a 30-inch by 30-inch culvert. Flood waters also washed away portions of three other roads, and wave action washed the shoulder of another road, making it narrower.

In Pembina County, officials indicate \$87,844 in damages occurred to 24 road sites. Damage to the DeFoe Bridge totals \$250,000.

### **Pierce County**

Preliminary damage assessment information, compiled by county and township officials, indicates more than \$356,346 in damage has occurred to 124 road sites in 19 townships in Pierce County. Spring runoff problems are aggravated by high soil moisture content in the area. There are several key areas of road damage reported that are isolating people from services and access to areas they farm. Most common problems resulting from this damage are field access, increased mileage to provide feed to livestock, increased mileage for milk pickup for several daily operators and increased mileage from emergency services for several families. The mileage increase required by using alternate routes range from 3 ½ to 10 miles in some areas of northern Pierce County.

### **Ramsey County**

Ramsey County officials are currently conducting an assessment of flood damages that have occurred thus far as Devils Lake continues its historic rise. Initial reports indicate that the city of Edmore has sustained \$10,000 in damages while the county's townships have reported approximately \$245,000 road damages. Additionally, Ramsey County Rural Utilities has recorded \$40,000 in damages. The assessment has not been completed for the city of Devils Lake. A countywide agricultural assessment is also underway.

Major erosion along the Devils Lake shoreline threatens to expose an eight-inch sewer main line that serves 30 homes in the Woodland Resort area. Officials are concerned that line break could

occur, creating environmental problems.

In earlier reports, Ramsey County officials indicated approximately 25 homes and structures in Ramsey County, another 25 in Benson County and 48 on the Spirit Lake Nation Reservation would be affected by flood waters if Devils Lake rises to 1,445.5 feet. Another 25 Ramsey County lakeshore structures are threatened by flood waters and are only protected by a road.

### **Rolette County**

In southeast Rolette County, spring runoff has caused six culverts to collapse and resulted in 17 road washouts and 41 roads where water has washed over them. Two high grade roads are inundated, and eight field access roads are either inundated or washout. Because of flooded roads, farmers are reportedly traveling 15 to 30 miles to gain access to fields located only three or four miles away. Officials report that they do not have the financial resources to maintain the current road system and to repair flood damages.

In Rolette County, officials indicate \$35,800 in damages to 64 road sites and culverts.

A rising Island Lake has expanded from approximately 1.5 miles long to 6.5 miles long during the past six years. As a result 525 acres of crops and 1,165 acres of pasture and hayland and some county and township roads have been inundated.

### **Towner County**

Towner County officials have closed 42 road sites that have been inundated or damaged by runoff. Of those sites, 11 remain closed. The County Road Superintendent preliminary estimates that \$40,000 in damage has occurred to the county road system.

Other projected state costs may include nearly \$59 million for state cost share of structural protective measures for the citizens of Grand Forks and Devils Lake.

#### **4. RESOURCES:**

LOCAL: No change from previous reports.

STATE: No change from previous reports.

FEDERAL: No change from previous reports.

#### **5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: No change from previous reports.**

#### **6. MAJOR ACTIONS: The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has granted a waiver for 1998 for Devils Lake area shoreline structures at 1,444 to 1,445.5 feet in elevation.**

Governor Schafer has signed an Emergency Proclamation and Executive Order 1998-02 declaring a flood emergency for the Devils Lake Basin in North Dakota. This state declaration will allow state and federal agencies to continue to support local interests in the Devils Lake area.

NFIP officials anticipate that approximately 30 insured structures will be relocated under the waiver. The waiver went into effect April 30 and is for claims filed on or before September 30. The State NFIP Coordinator stated that, in order to qualify for the waiver, property owners are required to have purchased insurance by March 1. The waiver suspends a policy provision calling for 90 days of continuous inundation as a condition for considering property as a total loss. The new waiver requires property owner to buy back the salvage and to move the building to a new location that is at an elevation of 1,460 feet or higher. Property owners must also transfer the title of the original lot to the local community. Owners of buildings relocated under prior waivers are not eligible to receive the benefits of this latest waiver.

According to officials associated with FEMA's NFIP, the flood insurance claims paid to North Dakota in 1997 totaled \$86,684,098.

As indicated, in response to flood-related problems, counties in the Devils Lake Basin and surrounding areas are conducting damage assessments. They have activated their local Emergency Operations Plans and implemented flood preparedness and response plans. County public works crews and contractors are repairing damaged roads as funding permits. Public works and law enforcement officials have blocked and signed flooded roads. Drains in low-lying areas have been managed. Local officials have issued news releases advising motorists to use caution when

traveling on flooded roads. Communities loaned sandbags to flood-threatened cities. Public health nurses have provided tetanus shots to flood-fight workers.

In Pembina County, emergency routes have been restored in several areas.

In Benson County, cleanup efforts are underway at the site of the April 30 Soo Line Railroad train derailment.

Nelson, Rolette and Towner Counties have issued disaster declarations, while Benson, Pembina, Pierce, Ramsey and Ransom have issued emergency declarations. Cities that have issued emergency declarations include: Neche and Hensel in Pembina County; the city of Michigan in Nelson County; and the city of Grafton in Walsh County.

### **1997 Flood**

Forty homes in Grand Forks recently were tested for petroleum odors, which may have resulted from home heating fuel oil spills that occurred during the April 1997 flood. The homes selected were based on an initial telephone survey of 271 homes. Of the homes selected for sampling, 34 had fuel oil spills during the flood. Six homes that did not flood or have fuel oil spills served as a comparison for the study. Of the households sampled, 32 were below the benchmark level, four had hydrocarbon concentrations within the benchmark level range and four households contained hydrocarbon vapors above the benchmark level. The testing was conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the N.D. Department of Health and the Grand Forks Public Health.

If remedial actions are necessary to deal with fuel oil contamination, officials of local, state and federal health and environmental safety organizations will assist individuals to determine a course of action. Financial assistance for such actions may be made available through FEMA Individual Assistance programs.

The 1997 Spring Flood Individual and Family Grant Program, administered by North Dakota Emergency Management, has approved nearly \$14.25 million in grants to individuals for flood losses. The average IFGP grant is \$1,349. The staff has closed 23,253 cases. Of the more than 23,000 IFGP applications processed for grant awards, only 16 have been appealed by the applicants. Of those appeals, 14 were denied and two were paid in full.

Also relating to the 1997 flood, as of May 7, FEMA and State Emergency Management Public Assistance staffs had received 4,458 Damage Survey Reports (DSRs) and had obligated funds for 4,396 DSRs. DSRs have been completed for 426 of the 440 applicants for the 1997 flood. At this time, nearly \$121 million in infrastructure repairs, emergency work and debris removal has been determined to be eligible statewide.

The North Dakota Hazard Mitigation Team has approved the entire 1997 flood allocation \$39.9 million available through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for projects designed to reduce or eliminate the risk of future flooding statewide. To date, nearly \$31 million available funds have been approved, or are pending FEMA approval. Projects include acquisition of properties in floodplains and infrastructure enhancements to include sluice gates, flap gates and lift stations.

As of May 6, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has fully disbursed approximately 97.5 percent of the net loans approved to victims of the 1997 floods. The SBA has approved more than \$182.2 million in low-interest loans for businesses and individuals. To date, the SBA has received 11,662 loan applications, 6,975 of which have been approved. Of the total amount of money loaned, 54 percent were to home owners and renters for real estate and personal property losses, and 46 percent were to business owners for repairs to businesses and for lost income.

To date, 24,496 eligible applicants have been approved for nearly \$54.6 million in Disaster Housing assistance provided by FEMA.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No change from previous reports.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No change from previous reports.
9. OTHER: The next State Flood Coordination Center meeting is scheduled for 1:30 p.m., May 14,

1998, at the Ramsey County Courthouse basement meeting room.

Other web site addresses for flood recovery information include:

N.D. Division of Emergency Management: <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>

N.D. League of Cities: <http://www.ndlc.org>

N.D. State Water Commission: <http://water.swc.state.nd.us>

N.D. Attorney General Office: <http://www.state.nd.us/ndag>

N.D. Department of Agriculture: <http://www.state.nd.us/agr/>

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: <http://www.ncs-wc.usace.army.mil>

U.S. Geological Survey: <http://srv1dndbmk.cr.usgs.gov/public/index.html>

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Douglas C. Friez, State Director